

Black Donald

N M Gillson

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To Jean

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HISTORIAN'S NOTE

The Scottish folklore of Black Donald can be found through appropriate research and although this story is based on that folklore, it bears no resemblance to any actual events associated with Black Donald and therefore is purely a fictional story.

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Kirkfale, Scotland
1910

“Rose, are ye in? Can I come in?” A tall, slender man with grey hair stood in the centre of the sandy road facing the shoe-maker’s shop. He wore a long black cloak that trailed on the ground and was covered in dirt at the hem. The relentless rain had been falling for several days soaking his hair and aging face, but it seemed not to affect him or his endeavours. His shoulders hung as if they were weary from having walked for days, but his arms were clasped before him as if to show respect for who he was talking to. He looked up at the second floor windows and then down to the ground floor shop window to see if there was any sign of movement within the wooden building. There was none that he could discern.

In the distance, the overflowing rivers that usually flowed along the outskirts of the village of Kirkfale, crashed down the nearby mountains. The crackling sounds carried through the small twisted streets and ricocheted off every structure in the ancient settlement, creating a rustling melody to the backdrop of rising mountains. A solitary bird on a desperate search for its next meal sliced through the heavy rain. Ignoring the dark, grey clouds that hovered above, emptying their watery contents onto the ground below, it circled before landing on a twisted gutter covered in pale moss.

Nestled in the heart of the deepest valleys of the Grampian Mountain Range in Scotland, Kirkfale was largely unknown to outsiders. The main roads connecting the towns of the North and East to those of the South had been laid several miles south of the village. With only one road in and out of Kirkfale, the villagers seldom left the valley and rarely accommodated guests who dared venture this far into the mountains. It came as a big surprise to many of the villagers, at first, when they discovered this stranger staying with the owner of the shirt shop a few months ago, but as the days went on, his presence was more accepted as he flitted between villagers, making use of their hospitality and learning their skills. Through the course of gossip, the stranger had been called many names, but one seemed to be favoured above all others; Black Donald.

“Come on, open up, I only wanna be yer friend,” Black Donald said with a cheery voice. Truth be known, he was struggling to hide his annoyance, he failed to understand why this one shop, the last one before the end of the village, had closed when all the others had accepted him with open arms. This last shop lay between him and his goal. That annoyed him. “I’ll tell ye what, ye open yer door and teach me ev’rythin’ ye ken and I’ll see to it that ye’ll thrive and become rich beyond yer wildest dreams.” He smiled, but it soon dropped to a grimace. *How dare she resist me.*

Despite the rain, the street quickly filled up with villagers when they heard Black Donald’s persistent shouting. They gathered on both sides talking to one another and wondering why Rose, the shoe-maker, was not answering. After a few more minutes, Donald turned to the villagers and pleaded, “Does anybody ken where Rose is? She’s no’ answerin’ her door.” He wanted to smile at the gathered crowd, it had not taken him long to alter their perceptions and turn them to his will and desires. *It was easy really; they are so weak-willed.* Instead, he looked pleadingly at those around him but nobody made a move to help. Despite his ‘power’ over these people, they still showed signs of mistrust, *perhaps they are not as weak-willed as I thought.* Eventually, a small boy gingerly stepped forward. No higher than Black Donald’s

waist, he carried a basket in which Donald presumed he had bread, "What do ye ken, Son?" he said softly to the boy.

"Mister, Rose as awa' th'day. She said she'll no' be back for some time and if anybody asked where she was, I was to say that." The boy beamed at Donald with a grin from ear to ear.

Donald nodded his head, "what's yer name, Son?"

"Tommy, Mister." Donald was amazed Tommy showed no sign of fear or apprehension. He had already recognised the boy but the name placed him as the farmer's son and he realised why he had so much confidence.

Taking a step closer, Donald contemplated his next move. "Are ye no' that bairn from the farm at the top o' the village?" Of course he knew the answer, but manipulating the boy would get him the information he needed.

"Aye that I am, Mister." Tommy replied with pride. He puffed out his chest and stood as tall as he could as if a stick had been pushed down his shirt and trousers.

"Yer father taught me how to gather wool from sheepies?"

"Aye that he did, Mister." Tommy nodded slightly. The corners of Donald's mouth began to curl slowly upwards.

"An' yer mother taught me how to turn th'wool in to a jumper?"

"Aye that she did, Mister," Tommy maintained his smug demeanour and did not take his eyes away from Black Donald. If he were anyone else, Black Donald would have found that disconcerting and uncomfortable, but he was beginning to like Tommy's charisma.

"Are ye sure ye heard the message right? Do ye have any idea where she's gone and when she'll be back?"

Tommy thought for a moment before answering, "I dinna ken all that, Mister, but I'm tellin' ye noo, Rose is no' there, she left the other day wi' big bags an' seemed in a hurry." He stretched his arms out to signify the size of the bags allowing the basket to sway a little.

"And ye are sure about that noo'?" He wanted to be sure, but he had already discerned from Tommy that this endeavour was pointless. Rose, the only one who could teach him how to make shoes, was gone.

"Aye!" Black Donald nodded in defeat and sighed. He allowed his anger well up inside. His plan had been foiled again, like so many times before. This time, however, it would be different; he still controlled the moment.

Black Donald looked into Tommy's eyes, a small part of him was sad that he would have to do what he was about to do, but he refused to let something like human emotion get in his way. He looked up to the crowd behind Tommy, "Have I no' paid ye handsomely for all yer hospitality? Have I no' been generous wi' ma wealth in return for yer skills?" He threw his arms into the air, "Do ye think I canna hear ye, mutterin and laughin behind my back? What have I done to deserve yer disloyalty? I could have gone anywhere to learn these skills, but I chose Kirkfale because I believed ye were a good people. Clearly, I was wrong!" He slid his aged and haggard hand into the front opening of his robe and then retracted it slowly. As the hand left the robe, it clasped the hilt of a sword. Within seconds, he had withdrawn the long, thin blade and had raised it above his head with both hands. His robe lifted off the ground as his arms stretched up in readiness for Black Donald to make his first strike, his feet barely visible. The multi-faceted ruby at the end of the hilt reflected rays of red light over Donald's face creating an eerie glow. His eyes turned fiery amber and his cheeks wrinkled deeper as he bore his teeth and began to snarl.

The villagers screamed and ran in every direction, bumping into each other but somehow, scrambling away. Some ran into their shops or houses and locked the doors the best they could. "Look at ye all run as if there are places to hide from my power." Donald's voice boomed throughout the valley like a lion's roar. The screech of a bird sounded high above his head, but he ignored it, "I'll find ye all. I'll slay ye all. Then I'll burn yer whole village down to the ground. Not one of ye will escape my wrath. Ye all will be damned to hell and the one who brought this

upon ye, will perish; her and her descendants.” He roared again. Several nearby windows smashed spraying frantic villagers with shards of glass.

Donald looked back at the boy, why had he not run like the others? He stood watching Donald, albeit drenched from the rain.

“Mister, why are yer...” He began but stopped when fear struck his face for the first time since stepping forward from the crowd.

Black Donald swung his sword in one swift motion at Tommy slicing his midsection with little effort. He watched Tommy’s face as his eyes went bloodshot and maroon blood appeared at his mouth, “Shame, I liked you.” Without another thought, he turned and singled out his next victim.

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